

THE
L I F E
O F
COMMODUS.

THE

I H I J



COMMODOUS

2

THE
HEIR APPARENT:
OR, THE
LIFE OF COMMODUS;

THE SON AND SUCCESSOR OF THE GOOD
M. AURELIUS ANTONINUS,
EMPEROR OF ROME.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK OF HERODIAN.

WITH

A PREFACE ADAPTED TO THE PRESENT TIMES.

[by Richard Graves]



LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. DODSLEY, IN PALL-MALL.
M.DCC.LXXXIX.

THE
HEIR APPARENT:

TYPE OF COMMODUS

THE SON AND SUCCESSOR OF THE GOOD

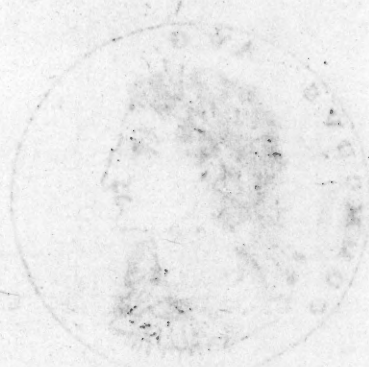
M. AURELIUS ANTONINUS

EMPEROR OF ROME

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK OF HERODIAN.



A RECENT ADAPTED EDITION



PRINTED FOR J. DOUGLASS, IN BALL-MALL.

W. B. DOUGLASS

TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE,
THE HONOURABLE,
THE WORSHIPFUL,
AND
THE REVEREND
AMATEURS AND PATRONS
OF THE NOBLE
SCIENCE OF BOXING.

MY LORDS, AND GENTLEMEN,

AS you seem ambi-
tious of reviving the gymnastic
exercifes

exercifes of the ancient Romans; I beg leave to recommend to your patronage this Life of Commodus, the *Imperial Prize-fighter*; whose rank, partiality for the sports of the amphitheatre, and other
 * *manly performances*, give a sanction and add the greateſt

* Matronas et meretrices, ſine delectu, conſtupravit.

FR. MEDIOBARE.

Imp. Rom. Numiſm.

lustre to your favourite amusements.

I am, (with admiration of
your taste and patriotic labours)

My Lords, and Gentlemen,

Your most obedient

humble Servant,

THE TRANSLATOR.

lure to your favourite amuse-

ments.

THEIR APPEARANCE

I am, with admiration of

your taste and patriotic la-

bour.

to your friends and

written the lines of the Roman em-

Your most obedient

friend, also a humble servant,

of the younger son of a noble

THE TRANSLATOR

and a writer of the old and new

years from the Roman and

though a native of Alexandria, who

[2]

THE
HEIR APPARENT, &c.

PREFATORY INTRODUCTION.

HAVING lately had occasion to consult Herodian, who has written the Lives of the Roman Emperors, from the death of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, to the accession of the younger Gordian, I was agreeably surprized to meet with so classical a writer, at the distance of 200 years from the Augustan age. For though a native of Alexandria, who

B had

had lived a great part of his life at Rome, cannot be supposed to write the Greek language with attic purity; yet his style is perspicuous and elegant; his narrative concise and interesting; and (as Photius, a good critic, observes) he has neither swelled his work with superfluous circumstances; nor omitted any thing necessary to be known; and, in short, that he yields to few writers, in the essential qualities of a good historian.

Herodian's Life of Commodus is so striking an example of the baneful influence of *unlimited* power on the morals and conduct of those princes, who are possessed of it; and of the danger

danger to which young persons of almost every rank are exposed, from the base flatteries and pernicious counsels of interested and profligate associates; that I thought a translation of it, printed in a *portable* form, might chance to be of use, if pointed out to them by those who have the care of their education; as an alarming instance, to what an enormous extravagance even *well-disposed* minds may proceed; by an unrestrained indulgence of every appetite and passion, and every caprice of a wild imagination.

For, though some authors have represented Commodus, as *naturally* vicious and cruel (though Herodian

does not) yet I have a better opinion of human nature: I hope, and am myself persuaded, that no one is by *nature* inclined to vice or cruelty: and that on the contrary, virtue and the love of our species, benevolence and *humanity* are congenial to the human mind. But, by the wrong management of those who have the care of our infancy; and by the neglect or absurd indulgence of those who superintend our education; the appetites and passions grow headstrong and refuse to submit to reason. And, where there is no external force to check them, the Prince, whom nature formed for a mild governor and a blessing to his people; becomes

a tyrant

a tyrant and the scourge of his unhappy subjects. Nero himself appeared to be, and, I suppose, *naturally* was, virtuously inclined; and his education under the wise Seneca, had for some time its proper effect. But no one knows, *what* he should do, if he were at full liberty to do, whatever his inclination suggested*.

‘ Dic mihi, si fueris tu leo, qualis eris.’

MARTIAL.

Tell me, if you were a lion, what you would do.

The progress of Commodus from a tolerably virtuous character to a

* This was an obvious sentiment in the age of Domitian.

‘ Nihil est quod credere de se

‘ Non possit, cum laudatur, diis æqua potestas!’

JUVENAL.

monster of vice and cruelty ; with the circumstances which contributed to it ; may, I think, be evidently traced in this history of Herodian ; without supposing him to have been born with any uncommon propensity to those vices.

“ But what end can it answer,” it will naturally be asked, “ to publish the life of a single emperor, when we have already so many *general* histories of Rome ; and especially, when Mr. Gibbon has so lately given us the history of the Antonines, with such elegance and knowledge of his subject ; that every writer must shrink into nothing from the comparison ? ”

To this I can only answer, That *general* histories seldom condescend to such minute particulars, as to render them equally interesting with the narratives of a biographer. And, although the charms of Mr. Gibbon's style and manner in his *summary* history of those princes cannot fail to engage our utmost attention; yet his work is voluminous and expensive: and this is an indolent and dissipated age; when many a young man of fortune, who would not scruple to give fifty pounds for an hunter, or five hundred for a race-horse, would perhaps grudge five pounds, or five shillings, for a Livy, a Robertson, an Hume, or a Gibbon.

And a young man of fashion may be induced to read a *single* life of a prize-fighter or a boxer; printed in the size of a *novel*; who would be startled at a series of history or biography, in the formidable shape of a folio or a quarto; and be deterred from attempting so laborious an achievement. But if he can be once prevailed on to peruse a single life, he may be induced to read more. And probably his curiosity will be as much gratified (perhaps usefully so) by the monsters in the *moral* world, which he will meet with in going through the Augustan history; as by the account of elephants and crocodiles, and other *monsters* in the *natural* world,

world, which he would meet in travelling through Egypt or the desarts of Africa*.

Xenophon's Cyrus, Castiglioni's Courtier, Bolingbroke's Patriot King, Richardson's Grandison, and almost every novel we look into, will furnish us with beautiful and useful models, of what kings and their subjects ought to be. We read and admire them; but calmly pursue our own inclinations, and go on contentedly in the beaten track of life, without imitating the perfection which we admire.

* It is doing these poor animals an injury, however, to call them *monsters*; as their enormous bulk or uncouth shape is the regular work of nature.

But

But it might be more advantageous perhaps, though less pleasing, to contemplate sometimes those monsters of villainy, in real life; which excite our horror and alarm our fears, for the consequences of our ungoverned passions and vicious indulgences. Those who are not allured to goodness by the beauty of virtue; may yet be deterred from wickedness by the deformity of vice, and the infamy attending it.

Though, to raise the curiosity of the public, I have called this performance ‘*The Heir Apparent*,’ no one, I trust, on perusing it, will suspect, that I intend any indecent allusion to any individual Heir Apparent

rent of our own times; much less to that amiable Prince, the Heir Apparent to this crown; a Prince who is universally allowed to possess goodness of heart and strength of understanding, equal to any of his predecessors, who have sat on the throne of Great Britain.

The *Heir Apparent*, however, in every rank of life, from the propensity of mankind to ‘worship the rising sun,’ will always be in danger from the flattering insinuations and interested views, of the dependents who surround him.

The young Lord has, too often, his buffoons and parasites, nominal captains and sporting clergymen: the
young

young 'Squire his huntsmen and grooms; jockeys and cockfighters; who, to supply their want of other merit, will promote his vicious pleasures, and encourage him in every unworthy pursuit, for which he betrays the least inclination. And the more sober and religious; the more attentive to his son's morals the father is; the more industrious will these worthless associates be to ridicule and counteract those prudent precautions that militate against the corrupt influence which it is their interest to maintain over his thoughtless heir.

Hence it comes to pass, that as the heir of a rich man frequently grows
extra-

extravagant, and squanders away the wealth, amassed by the frugality of his parents; so the son of a wise and virtuous man, presuming on the popularity and established character of his father, too often grows insolent and licentious, and disgraces the good name, on which he founds his own pretensions.

Such was the situation of the young Commodus. After the death of the emperor Domitian, the last of the twelve Cæsars, (a majority of whom were a disgrace to human nature) Rome was happily governed by five successive good emperors, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, usually

usually stiled the Philosopher ; one of the best, and, allowing for a little stoical vanity, one of the wisest of the Roman emperors. Commodus was the son of Marcus Aurelius, by the younger Faustina ; the daughter of Antoninus Pius ; a lady, equally distinguished by her beauty and, what we *Christians* call, *gallantries* ; but what the more rigid Roman historians named adulteries. The fondness which her son Commodus shewed for the sanguinary sports of the amphitheatre, is by some fanciful writers ascribed to her having sucked the blood from the wounds of a favourite gladiator : and others impute it to a more intimate com-

merce with one of those athletic champions.

The good emperor, however, esteemed his empress Faustina amongst those peculiar blessings which he had received from Heaven: and speaks of her as an obedient, affectionate, and *chaste* wife*. And perhaps, though a lady, who had literally the whole world at her command, should have indulged herself in a little variety, she might be, in other respects, what the philosopher esteemed her. She attended her husband in one of his

* Lib. i. de Seipso. πειθηνιον, φιλοστοργον, και ἀφελῆ. The second of these words, most probably means, 'fond of her children,' as it properly signifies; and the last most properly means '*simple* or plain,' but Marcus probably meant *chaste*.

most hazardous expeditions, in which she died of the gout. And Galen, who was physician to the household, mentions a compliment which she paid him, on his having cured her son Commodus of a dangerous fever; 'That other physicians endeavoured to recommend themselves by fine words; but that Galen shewed his skill by its effects.' This compliment to her son's physician is a presumptive proof of her being an attentive and fond mother.

But if the philosophic emperor had any suspicion of the empress's incontinence, he acted perhaps on the stoical maxim of '*Bear and Forbear.*' They thought themselves
obliged

obliged by their rules to *bear*, with the utmost equanimity, all the external evils of life: and the infidelity of a beloved wife is probably one of the greatest calamities incident to mankind*. However this may be, they both concurred in the virtuous education of their son Commodus; and, if a youth of fifteen was more attentive to the lectures of a fencing-

* M. Aurelius was uniform in his regard for Faustina. If in his moments of fondness he had called her Goddess, when living, he publicly declared her such, when dead: having her deified by a decree of the senate. The Romans displayed great magnificence in their compliments to their deceased friends and favourites. A modern lover fancies a ring or erects an urn to his mistress: a Roman prince struck medals, built temples, and sometimes founded cities to perpetuate their love for the deceased.

master or of a gay libertine, than to those of a grave philosopher, it is no uncommon case. The misfortune was, that the young prince came to the imperial throne at the too early age of nineteen; when his passions were strong, and reason had not yet taken the helm. And, being surrounded by profligate associates, gladiators, parasites, and buffoons; we can no more wonder at his debaucheries, luxury, and extravagance; and the consequent oppressions of his people, and his cruelties; nor even at his folly in assuming the club and lion's skin, and emulating the fame of Hercules, than we can at the excesses of many young men in modern

dern times, who affect the dress of coachmen, grooms, and jockeys! and are ambitious of rivalling them in riding races; and of imitating the savage accomplishments of an Humphreys or a Mendoza *.

As for this latter amusement, before it became so fashionable amongst the higher ranks of life, I have known, within the contracted sphere of my own observation, so many accidents from boxing: of consumptions brought on by blows on the stomach; dislocated jaws, and eyes beat out; and the like; that I cannot think it a diversion to be so zea-

* Well known (at present) for their skill in boxing.

lously encouraged. But if our young gentry are so desirous of reviving the manly exercises of our ancestors, *wrestling* is a more genteel, and back-sword or *cudgel*-playing a less dangerous, amusement: and neither of them conducted with that brutal ferocity, which marks the exploits of our heroes of the fist or professors of boxing.

It has always been reckoned one of the advantages introduced into the moral world and civil life by Christianity, that it has abolished the bloody and inhuman shews of the gladiators; of which the Romans were fond, to an astonishing excess. For to be pleased with the agonies
and

and dying groans of our fellow-creatures is horrible beyond conception. Yet, to sit calmly and even with delight, to see men, with savage fury (and as naked as savages) levelling blows, and endeavouring to injure, or to disable each other, in every part of the body, is a degree of depravity, in my opinion, little short of the former. Not to mention the degrading sight, of gentlemen of liberal education (and fine feelings, forsooth) mixed, on these occasions, with the lowest and meanest of mankind.

The Romans, from custom or, at least, from fear, bore with patience the enormous and wanton cruelties

even of Commodus: but viewed with disgust and horror, the dignity of the empire debased by their first magistrate exhibiting himself publicly in the amphitheatre. And when, after his death, the senate were studying how to express their detestation of the emperor's conduct in the most emphatical manner, they could think of no stronger terms, or more expressive of infamy, than Tyrant, Parricide, and *Gladiator*.

N. B.

THOSE who have never given much attention to the Roman military affairs, must observe, that the Prætorian Guards, so often mentioned in this history, and who, more than once (like Cromwell's army and the Turkish janisaries) disposed of the sovereign power, were a body of 10 or 12,000 men; first instituted by Augustus, as a life-guard; and were stationed by Tiberius, in a regularly fortified camp on the Quirinal hill, on the east side of Rome.—By their licentiousness and disregard to discipline, and by the civil commotions which they were continually raising,

they were one of the first causes of the decline of the Roman grandeur.

But of this and every part of the Roman antiquities, any one will have a clearer idea, from what is occasionally introduced by Mr. Gibbon, than by reading the twelve volumes in folio of Grævius, or any other professed writer on the subject.

THE
L I F E
O F
C O M M O D U S.

FROM THE GREEK OF
HERODIAN, Book I.

E H T

1

COMMODORE

HERODIAN, Book I.

S E C T. I.

THE Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus had several daughters, but only two sons. The younger of the sons died at a very early age; he was named Verissimus: the other, called Commodus, his father educated with the greatest care; having invited, and encouraged with no contemptible appointments, from the different nations of the empire, men the most approved for their wisdom and learning; that being always conversant with his son, they might in-

spect

spect his morals and cultivate his understanding*.

His daughters also, when grown to maturity, he gave in marriage to some of the most respectable senators: not being ambitious to have for his sons-in-law men illustrious for their birth and a long series of ancestors; or adorned with the splendid trappings of a great fortune; but such as were distinguished by the probity of their manners and the regularity of their lives: esteeming the good qualities of the mind, the only real and durable possessions.

* The Greek is simply παιδεύειν τὸν υἱόν : but where Politian does not depart much from the sense, (as he sometimes does) I have adopted his manner of expression.

7 Marcus Aurelius carefully practised every moral virtue. And was likewise so much addicted to literary pursuits and the study of antiquity, that he was second to no one, either of the Greeks or Romans, in that respect. Many of his observations and of his writings, which are come down to us, are an evident proof of this.

He also behaved with the utmost affability and condescension to every one that approached him: took them familiarly by the hand; and would not suffer his guards to refuse any one admittance that required it.

He alone of all our emperors also shewed his regard to philosophy, not merely by his words and the knowledge

ledge of its precepts; but by the purity of his morals and the austerity of his life. Hence it came to pass, that his reign produced a great number of wise and learned men. For subjects always imitate and conform themselves to the taste and sentiments of the ruling powers.

His prudent conduct in political affairs, and his great exploits in his military capacity; both amongst the inhabitants of the northern regions, and amongst the nations of the East, have been written by many learned men. But those events which happened after the death of Marcus Aurelius; which, during the course of my own life, I have either seen or
heard;

heard; or in which I have been personally engaged (having been employed in many public transactions) these I have related in the following narrative.

S E C T. II.

MARCUS being now advanced
 in years; and worn out, not
 only with age, but with cares and
 toils: while he was yet detained
 amongst the Pannonians, was seized
 with a dangerous disease: and being
 sensible that there were no hopes of
 his recovery; and seeing his son just
 arrived on the verge of manhood;
 he was apprehensive, that being now
 in the vigour of youth; and posses-
 sing, by the loss of a father, a free
 and unrestrained liberty to pursue his
 own inclinations; he might throw off
 the

the reins of discipline; and the pursuit of reputable studies: and give himself up to luxury and intemperance. For the minds of youth make but too easy a transition from the severity of discipline to a life of pleasure and sensual indulgence.

The old emperor being well versed in the history and knowledge of mankind, was greatly alarmed at the recollection of several princes, who had arrived at sovereign power in their early youth; such as Dionysius, the tyrant of Sicily, for instance; who, from his excessive luxury, was continually in quest of some new indulgence at an enormous expence. Such also were the injuries and op-

D

pressions

pressions exercised on their subjects, by the successors of Alexander, which brought so great a disgrace on his government. For Ptolemy proceeded to so scandalous an excess, as to indulge a passion for his own sister; contrary * to the laws and customs of the Greeks and Macedonians. And Antigonus, that he might represent Bacchus in every respect, instead of the Macedonian bonnet and diadem, ridiculously wore a crown of ivy on his head, and a thyrsus in his hand instead of a sceptre.

But the good emperor's mind was

* Corn. Nepos, asserts the reverse of this: but it is supposed that he means an half-sister; by the same father but a different mother.

still

still farther alarmed by some examples more recent, and almost within his own memory: as by that of Nero; who arrived at that degree of wickedness, as to put his own mother to death; and afterwards exhibited himself on the stage, a ridiculous spectacle to the Roman people. As also the audacious acts of Domitian; who left no instance of the utmost cruelty unperpetrated. Revolving therefore in his mind these acts of tyranny, he was distracted between hope and fear, for the future conduct of his son.

Neither was he a little alarmed with apprehensions of the neighbouring Germans; whom he had not yet

entirely subdued; but part of them he had received into alliance; and part he kept in awe by the terror of his arms: there were some of them also who had retreated at present, through fear of the presence of so great an emperor, but who, he suspected, from a contempt of his youthful successor, would again take arms and renew their incursions: for these barbarians take a pleasure in raising commotions on every the most trifling occasion.

The mind of the emperor therefore fluctuating with so many anxious cares; he called together his friends and what relations were on the spot; and when they were assembled,

sembled, placing his son Commodus before them, and raising himself gently from his couch, he addressed them in words to this effect.

THE SPEECH OF MARCUS
ANTONINUS.

“ I do not at all wonder, that you
“ are grieved, my friends, at be-
“ holding me in my present condi-
“ tion : as compassion for the suf-
“ ferings of our fellow-creatures is
“ natural to mankind: and those
“ calamities which fall under our
“ immediate inspection, still more
“ sensibly affect us. I flatter my-
“ self however that a more interest-
“ ing connexion subsists between you

“ and me. And from a consciouf-
 “ nefs of what I feel for *you*, I may
 “ reasonably hope that the affection
 “ is mutual. But now a season-
 “ able opportunity presents itself,
 “ when I may be convinced, that I
 “ have not in vain, for fo long a
 “ period, bestowed on you my re-
 “ gard and attention; and you, by
 “ making fome return, may demon-
 “ ftrate, that you are not unmind-
 “ ful of the kindness which I have
 “ fhewn you. You here behold my
 “ fon, (whom you yourselves have
 “ brought up,) juft launching on the
 “ tide of youth; and as in a ftorm
 “ or hurricane, wanting a pilot to
 “ conduct him, that he may not be
 “ borne

“ borne away, through inexperience,
 “ to dishonourable and destructive
 “ pursuits. May you therefore, my
 “ friends, in the room of a single
 “ parent, prove as so many fathers;
 “ attending to his conduct and on
 “ all occasions suggesting the best
 “ and most wholesome advice.

“ For neither is the greatest abun-
 “ dance of wealth sufficient to gra-
 “ tify the luxury of a tyrant; nor
 “ the guards with which he is sur-
 “ rounded to protect him, unless he
 “ has previously secured the love and
 “ good will of his subjects. They
 “ only reign securely for any length
 “ of time, not who strike terror into
 “ the minds of their people by their
 D 4 “ cruelty,

“ cruelty, but who insinuate them-
 “ selves into their affections by their
 “ beneficence and their good go-
 “ vernment. For it is not those
 “ who serve through a forced sub-
 “ mission, but those who pay a vo-
 “ luntary obedience, that can be free
 “ from the suspicion of dissimulation;
 “ and do and suffer whatever is en-
 “ joined them; and who never shake
 “ off the reins of allegiance, unless
 “ driven to it by violence and in-
 “ juries. But it is difficult for any
 “ one to moderate and set bounds
 “ to his passions, when vested with
 “ *unlimited* power. But you, my
 “ friends, if you assist him with
 “ your counsels, and frequently re-
 “ mind

“ mind him of what he has now
 “ heard; will, I trust, make him a
 “ good sovereign to yourselves, and
 “ to all his subjects; and will also
 “ shew the greatest regard to my
 “ memory, and by this means alone,
 “ render it immortal.”

While the emperor was thus
 speaking, he was suddenly seized
 with a fainting fit; became silent;
 and through want of strength fell
 back on the couch. When all that
 were present, were so much affected,
 that some of them burst forth into
 loud lamentations. He however,
 having survived one night and a day,
 deceased; leaving to his cotempo-
 raries a mournful sense of his loss;

7

and

and a perpetual memory of his virtues to all posterity.

After the report of the death of Antoninus was divulged abroad, the army, and indeed the people in general were seized with incredible grief and concern: nor was there hardly a man under the Roman jurisdiction that received the news without tears. But all men as with one voice, bewailed his death, some as a kind parent, some as a good emperor: others as a brave general, and some as a wise and virtuous prince: nor were any of them insincere in these expressions of their grief.

S E C T.

S E C T. III.

AFTER some days were past, in which Commodus was employed in paying the funeral honours to his father; his friends judged it proper to bring the young prince to the camp; both that he might address the foldiers; and also might bestow on them a largess of money (according to the custom of receiving a new emperor) and conciliate their favour by a munificent donation. Orders therefore were issued out, that they should all assemble, in the usual plain for that purpose.

*

When

When therefore Commodus was come forth, and had performed the sacrifice in a solemn manner; a tribunal being raised aloft, in the middle of the camp, he ascended it, and his father's friends being placed around him (for there were many of them, and very respectable men present) he addressed them in words to this purpose:

THE SPEECH OF COMMODUS TO
THE ARMY.

“ I am persuaded, my fellow-
 “ soldiers, that you all sympathize
 “ with me, on the calamity which
 “ has befallen us. Nor can I doubt,
 “ that *you* are as sincerely afflicted
 “ as

“ as *I* am, on this mournful occasion.

“ For during the life of my father, I never conducted myself as your superior ; he having loved us all as one family, with the same paternal affection ; and was always better pleased to call me his fellow-soldier, than his son. For the one he considered as an appellation due to me by nature ; the other as his associate in virtue. And bearing me frequently in his arms when I was yet an infant, he recommended me to your fidelity and allegiance. I may therefore reasonably hope, that I shall experience every instance of kindness

“ nefs from every order amongst
 “ you : that my elders will confider
 “ me as their pupil ; thofe of my
 “ own age, as their fchool-fellow
 “ in the art of war. For my father,
 “ as I obferved, not only loved us
 “ equally as one family ; but in-
 “ ftructed us in every virtue and
 “ every ufeul accomplifhment. But
 “ fortune has now given you me
 “ for your emperor ; not as an adopt-
 “ ed heir to an adventitious inheri-
 “ tance ; (as all my predeceffors have
 “ been :) for I alone was brought
 “ forth in the palace : and never
 “ folded in the mantle of a private
 “ infant : but invested from the
 “ womb with the imperial purple :
 “ and

“ and the sun beheld me, on the
 “ same day, an human being and a
 “ prince.

“ When you reflect on these cir-
 “ cumstances you will naturally, I
 “ am convinced, regard me as an
 “ emperor, not forced upon you,
 “ but born your sovereign.

“ For my father being ascended
 “ to the cœlestial mansions, is hence-
 “ forth admitted to the assembly and
 “ society of the gods: but the admi-
 “ nistration of human affairs and the
 “ government of the world, is now
 “ incumbent on us: to regulate and
 “ firmly establish which, must be
 “ your care. And if you put an end
 “ to the remains of this war with
 “ spirit;

“ spirit; and extend the Roman em-
 “ pire to the borders of the ocean;
 “ you will both add fresh lustre to
 “ your own fame, and also make a
 “ grateful return to the memory of
 “ our common father: who, you may
 “ be assured, listens to our words and
 “ beholds our actions: we should
 “ therefore think ourselves happy to
 “ perform our duty in the presence
 “ of such a witness.

“ But I must also observe, that
 “ those brave actions which you have
 “ formerly performed are, in a great
 “ measure, to be attributed to his wis-
 “ dom and conduct. But whatever
 “ exploits you shall voluntarily at-
 “ chieve under so young a prince, of
 “ these

“ these you yourselves will receive
 “ the glory; and, at the same time,
 “ give a noble instance, both of
 “ your courage and of your fide-
 “ lity.

“ You will also, by your resolute
 “ conduct, supply the defects of my
 “ youth and give authority to my
 “ government; and the barbarians
 “ being repressed at the commence-
 “ ment of a new reign, will not dare
 “ to raise fresh commotions, from a
 “ contempt of my age; and from
 “ the dangers which they shall have
 “ experienced, will be kept in awe
 “ for the future.”

Commodus, having thus spoken,
 and gained the good-will of the

E

foldiers

soldiers by magnificent donations, returned to the imperial residence.

For some short time therefore every thing was transacted agreeably to the sentiments of his father's friends: who were about him the whole day, and gave him the most salutary advice; allowing him just so much leisure from business, as they thought sufficient for refreshment and the health of his person.

By degrees however some attendants on the court, insinuated themselves into the favour of the young emperor, and tried every means to corrupt his morals; a set of parasites, who estimate happiness by their appetites and the grossest pleasures:

pleasures: they were continually suggesting to him the delights of Rome; telling him of the public spectacles, theatres, and musical entertainments; and enumerating the abundance of all the delicacies of life at Rome, and reprobating the barrenness on the banks of the Danube; which produced no kind of fruits; but was exposed to the rigour of eternal frosts and unwholesome fogs. “ Shall
 “ our emperor,” said they, “ never
 “ cease to drink water, congealed
 “ and dug from dirty lakes? Shall
 “ others enjoy the warm springs or
 “ the cool streams and fountains?
 “ the balsamic air and delicious climate
 “ peculiar to Italy?”

With these and the like representations, they easily excited in the breast of the young prince an irresistible desire to enjoy the pleasures of Rome; the capital of the world.

all the dearest of life at Rome, and reprobating the barrenness on the banks of the Danube; which produced no kind of fruits; but was exposed to the rigour of eternal frosts and unwholesome fogs. "shall our emperors," said they, "never cease to drink water, congealed and dug from dirty lakes; shall others enjoy the warm springs or the cool fountains and fountains? the balsamic air and delicious climate peculiar to Italy?"

With

B 2

SECT.

S E C T. IV.

HAVING therefore immediately assembled his friends, he told them he had a great inclination to visit his native country. But being ashamed to confess the cause of so sudden a change, he pretended to be apprehensive, that some of the wealthier patricians might seize upon the imperial palace: and from thence, as from a fortified citadel, collecting a powerful guard, might usurp the sovereign power; for that the people of Rome could supply a sufficient

number of select youths to maintain such an usurpation.

The young prince having thus uttered this plausible harangue; the rest being struck silent with concern, stood with their eyes fixed on the ground; but Pompeianus, as being the oldest of the company, and related to the emperor by marriage (for he had married the eldest sister of Commodus) rising up, thus addressed him: “ O my son and my honoured
 “ lord, that you are impatient to
 “ visit your native country, is by
 “ no means to be wondered at: for
 “ we have all an equal desire to re-
 “ turn to our domestic enjoyments.
 “ But affairs more urgent, and of
 “ more

“ more immediate concern, oblige
 “ us to check that desire. For you
 “ will hereafter have sufficient time
 “ to enjoy the pleasures of Rome:
 “ though in reality, that may be
 “ considered as Rome and the court,
 “ wherever the emperor chuses to
 “ reside.

“ But to relinquish the war un-
 “ finished, is not only disgraceful,
 “ but dangerous. For we shall in-
 “ spire the barbarians with fresh
 “ courage; who will not suppose,
 “ that we have decamped merely for
 “ the sake of returning home; but
 “ that we are fled, and have de-
 “ serted the war through a coward-
 “ ly fear.

“ But consider, my young prince,
 “ how glorious it will be to you,
 “ (having conquered your enemies
 “ and extended the northern bounds
 “ of the empire to the ocean) to re-
 “ turn to Rome in triumph, lead-
 “ ing captive the kings and nobles
 “ of these barbarous nations. By
 “ these means, in the earlier ages of
 “ the commonwealth, the Romans
 “ became great and illustrious.

“ But there is not the least reason
 “ to fear, lest any one should usurp
 “ your power at Rome; for all the
 “ most respectable senators are here
 “ with you: and also the whole
 “ military force is here present to
 “ defend your empire. And more-
 “ over

“ over the imperial treasury is all in
 “ our possession. But above all, the
 “ memory of your good father, has
 “ confirmed the allegiance and esta-
 “ blished for you an everlasting in-
 “ terest in the minds of every good
 “ and powerful man.”

Pompeianus having spoken to this purpose, and given the young prince these salutary admonitions, for a while checked his ardor: for Commodus, out of reverence to the speaker, having nothing which he could reasonably urge in reply, dismissed his friends, telling them, that he would consider with himself more accurately, what was to be done.

Some

Some of his worthless dependants however continually* besieging him, he no longer communicated his intentions to his real friends: but having given *written orders* †, and distributed to those whom he thought proper, the care of defending the banks of the Danube, commanding them to repress the incursions of the

* ἐλκεμένον, "lying at him." I have observed many instances, where the idiom of the Greek language is nearer to the English, than the Latin is. As, ἐ παύσομαι γραφῶν, I will not cease writing: δεινὸν, μὴ ἐπευχέσθαις, a terrible man for never saying his prayers: with many better instances, which I cannot collect.

† This seems to be the sense, and not "sending letters to Rome," as Politian translates it.

barbarians,

barbarians, he proclaims his intention to march. Those therefore to whom this charge was intrusted, prepared to execute their orders; and in a short time took many of the barbarians prisoners; and others they brought over, by large subsidies, to the friendship of the Romans; which indeed was no difficult achievement: for these barbarians are by nature eager after money: and despising danger, supply the necessaries of life, either by incursions and devastation; or grant peace to their neighbours for some considerable pecuniary recompence. Commodus being aware of this;
and

and being desirous to purchase security at any price; having money in abundance, complied with their utmost demands.

S E C T.

S E C T. V.

WHEN therefore the emperor's intended departure was announced in the camp, the army was all in motion. For they were all impatient to return with their emperor; and to leave this hostile country; to enjoy the luxurious pleasures of Rome.

But when this report was divulged, and messengers arrived at Rome, proclaiming the emperor's approach, the whole Roman people were overjoyed; every one conceiving the best hopes from the residence of the
 young

young emperor, who, they took it for granted, would follow the good example of his father.

Commodus then performing his journey with youthful ardor; and passing through the cities that lay in the road with great expedition; being every where received in regal state; and exhibiting himself amidst the festival entertainments of the different people; he was beheld by all with the most favourable impressions and tokens of joy.

But on his approach to Rome, the whole senate and people; every individual inhabitant of Rome, not able to contain themselves; but every one striving to get the start of the
other;

other ; poured themselves forth ; bearing boughs of laurel in their hands and every kind of flowers then in bloom ; and went out to meet and behold the emperor ; equally conspicuous for his youth and his noble birth, for they loved him with a sincere affection ; as having been born and bred up amongst them ; and as inheriting the imperial power by descent in the third degree ; and as being also of a Roman family of patrician rank : for, by his father he was descended from the most distinguished of the senatorial order : and his mother Faustina, was of imperial rank ; being the daughter of Antoninus, called the Pious, and
the

the niece of Hadrian, by the mother's side, who also traced her pedigree to Trajan as her great-grandfather.

Such was the illustrious birth of Commodus. As to his person, he was not only in the very flower of youth, but had a dignity in his appearance; his body well-proportioned, and a beautiful yet manly countenance. There was a sweetness in his eyes mixed with a brilliant lustre: his hair curled naturally and was of a bright yellow; so that when he walked in the sunshine there was such a splendor glittered round him, that some people thought his hair was sprinkled with the filings
of

of gold *: nay, others pronounced it a mark of divinity ; which, they asserted, produced those cœlestial rays around his head : moreover, a downy beard just bloomed round his cheeks, and proclaimed him to be arrived at the age of puberty. The Romans therefore beholding their emperor such as we have described him, could not but receive him with auspicious acclamations of every kind ; adorning the road with garlands, and strewing flowers in his way.

When Commodus had made his entry into Rome ; and had solemnly visited the temple of Jupiter and

* This is said to have been really the case.

those of the other gods ; he immediately proceeded to return his thanks to the senate, and to the Prætorian cohorts (who were left at Rome) for preserving their fidelity to him ; and then retired to the imperial palace.

S E C T. VI.

FOR a few years then, he shewed a great respect and deference to his father's friends ; and transacted all his affairs by their advice and admonition. But, after he had taken the administration of the government into his own hands, he appointed one Perennius, an Italian by birth and well skilled in military affairs, to command the Prætorian guards : who, abusing the youth and inexperience of the young prince, permitted him to indulge in every degree of sensual pleasure and de-

bauchery; whilst he, under a pretence of easing Commodus of the cares and toils of empire, took upon himself the whole administration of the government; and being a man of insatiable avarice, despising his present acquisitions, he was continually gasping after more.

This man began first to calumniate the friends of the emperor's father, and afterwards, to raise suspicions of every man that was rich and of a noble family, that by alarming the fears of the young prince and subjecting them to punishment, he himself might take occasion to seize upon their forfeited possessions.

For

For some time however a reverence for his father's memory and a regard for his friends, kept the young man within bounds. But at length some malignant and envious fate seems, as it were, to have subverted the mind of a prince, hitherto kept within the bounds of decency and moderation. The affair, which I allude to, was this. Lucilla was the eldest sister of Commodus: she had first been married to Lucius Verus; whom Marcus Antoninus had associated with himself in the empire, and married him to his daughter; as thinking such an alliance the firmest bond of union and fidelity.

But Lucius being deceased, and the ensigns of sovereignty still remaining with Lucilla, her father gave her in marriage to Pompeianus: nevertheless Commodus preserved to his sister the same honours undiminished: for she appeared in the theatre sitting, as usual, on the imperial throne; and had still the sacred fire carried before her*.

But after Commodus was married to Crispina, and the first seat was necessarily allotted to the consort of the emperor; Lucilla not submitting to this patiently, considered the

* As an emblem of divinity and of chastity; says Pierius.—The fair Lucilla might as well have dispensed with this ceremony.

honour

honour which was paid to the empress as an injury to herself: yet being convinced that her husband Pompeianus had a sincere regard for Commodus, she would not communicate to him * her plan for seizing upon the sovereign power. But founding the inclinations of one Quadratus, a young nobleman of great wealth, (with whom also she was accused of carrying on secretly a criminal intercourse), she feelingly lamented the injury that was done her in the loss of her precedence: and, by degrees, prevailed upon the

* Some historians, without the least probability, make Pompeianus concerned in this conspiracy.

young man to enter into a conspiracy, fatal to himself; and in its consequences, to the whole senate. For having engaged some of senatorial rank as conspirators; he prevailed upon another young man, named Quintianus (who was also of that order) a forward, bold, and even rash youth, to conceal a dagger under his robe; and watching his opportunity, in a proper place, to fall upon and assassinate Commodus: adding, that he himself would take care of the rest by a liberal donation to the Prætorian guards.

Quintianus, placing himself in a
dark

dark corner, at the entrance of the amphitheatre, hoped to be concealed: and unsheathing his dagger, and coming suddenly up to Commodus, cried out with a loud voice, “ The
 “ *senate* sends thee this *.”

He could not accomplish his purpose, however: but, while he was employed in displaying his dagger and making his speech, he was seized by the emperor’s life-guards; and paid the penalty of his rash attempt: having given the emperor notice of his intention, instead of

* Herodian expresses it simply—“ That he
 “ was sent on this errand by the senate.” Modern historians have adopted Politian’s translation, “ Hunc tibi senatus mittit.”

executing

executing it, it was a caution to Commodus to take care of himself; and a watchword to the guards to seize the affassin.

S E C T.

S E C T. VII.

THIS then was the first and the principal cause of the young emperor's hatred of the senate. The words of the assassin made a deep impression on his mind; and being always uppermost in his thoughts, he considered them all in general as his professed enemies. Perennius also made this a sufficient pretence for his proceedings,—for he persuaded Commodus to cut off or disgrace every man of any eminence among them; whose fortunes he himself seizing upon, soon became the

the richest man of the age. And instituting also a more accurate investigation of the conspiracy, Commodus put to death his sister, and all the conspirators, and whomsoever, from Perennius's accusation, fell under the least suspicion, without mercy.

Perennius then having dispatched or got rid of all those, whom either Commodus himself had a regard for; or who regarded him with a paternal affection, and watched over his safety; and having got Commodus himself entirely under his management; began now to entertain views of the imperial power: and for that purpose persuades Commodus,

modus, to make *his* sons, though mere boys, commanders of the Illyrian legions: while he himself, having amassed immense sums of money, endeavoured to bring over the Prætorian guards from their allegiance. His sons also had secretly collected a great force; that when Perennius should have slain Commodus, they might seize upon the empire.

The plot however was discovered in a very unexpected manner. The Romans celebrate certain games in honour of Jupiter Capitolinus; where all kinds of athletic exercises are performed, and where, as may be supposed, immense crowds are assembled,

assembled, in so great a city. Amongst the priests, who, at stated periods, are appointed to officiate, the emperor himself, on these occasions, sits as a spectator and presides over the games. Commodus therefore being come to the theatre to hear some celebrated performers; and sitting in state on the imperial throne; the theatre being crowded with spectators; all sitting in regular order, according to their several ranks and dignity; before any thing was spoken or performed on the stage; a man in the habit of a philosopher (for he had a staff in his hand and a wallet hung over his half-naked shoulder) came hastily

6
ly

ly and stood in the midst of the stage, and beckoning to the people to keep silence: "Commodus!" says he, "this is not a time for
 " you to attend this assembly; nor
 " to sit idly beholding these festi-
 " val games. For the sword of
 " Perennius is this moment level-
 " led at your throat: and if you
 " do not guard against the dan-
 " ger, not threatening you, but
 " already present, you will be de-
 " stroyed before you are aware of
 " it. For Perennius himself is col-
 " lecting money and forces on the
 " spot, to destroy you; and his
 " sons are soliciting the Illyrian
 " troops to revolt; which, if you
 " do

“do not immediately prevent, you
“are undone!”

Having thus spoken, whether from some divine impulse; or whether a man, entirely unknown and obscure, made this bold attempt to acquire fame and glory; or whether he hoped to be munificently rewarded by the emperor, certain it is, that Commodus was struck dumb with astonishment. And though all men suspected there was some truth in what he had uttered, they affected to disbelieve it. But Perennius ordered him to be seized as an idle babbler and a madman; and immediately to be committed to the flames. Thus the
poor

poor man paid the penalty of his rash and ill-timed undertaking *.

* This seems a more remarkable instance of enthusiastic patriotism, than Felton's, Ravailac's, or any modern assassin's; as the grievances were palpable and intolerable, and the poor man's danger as great.

money

G

S E C T.

S E C T. VIII.

THOSE however about Commodus, who professed a regard for his interest; being before greatly incensed against Perennius for his intolerable pride and insolence, making use of this fair opportunity, endeavoured by their accusations to open the eyes of the emperor: it being become necessary that he should be rescued from this conspiracy; and that Perennius and his sons should be punished. For soon after this, some soldiers, without the knowledge of Perennius's son, brought some pieces of

money,

money, stamped with his head, and shewed them to Commodus, without the knowledge also of Perennius himself, though he commanded the Prætorian guards; and laid open the whole order of the conspiracy; for which they were amply rewarded.

Perennius then being ignorant of this, and suspecting nothing of the matter, Commodus by night sent an executioner, who cut off his head. And immediately dispatched some of his most expeditious messengers to Perennius's son, to prevent his knowledge of what was done at Rome: giving them also letters written in the most friendly terms to young Perennius, ordering him, with the ex-

pectation of something greatly to his advantage, to come immediately to Rome. He therefore being ignorant of what was prepared for his reception, and of the emperor's designs; as also of his father's fate; the messengers having moreover told him, that his father had given the like orders, and would have written but that he thought the emperor's commands were sufficient: the young man being prevailed upon, though with grief and reluctance, to leave his projected scheme unfinished; yet relying upon his father's having already established his power, prepared to return. But, as soon as he had reached Italy, those to whom the charge

charge was committed, immediately dispatched him *. Such was the end of this aspiring family.

But Commodus now appointed two præfects of the guards; thinking it more safe, not to trust so great a power to a single person: and hoped, that being divided it would be rendered weaker; and less likely to inspire either of them with ambitious thoughts of the imperial power.

* Other historians give a different account of the death of Perennius. But this seems a very consistent one.

S E C T. IX.

AT no great distance of time however another plot of the same kind was formed against Commodus. There was one Maternus, who had been a soldier, and in that capacity had been guilty of many audacious acts. And deserting from the army, and persuading several of his fellow-soldiers to do the same, had, in a short time, collected a great band of desperate fellows; and at first, strolled about and pillaged the villages and the neighbouring country. And being now possessed of a considerable

considerable sum of money, he assembled a still greater force, by liberal promises; and by admitting them to a share of the plunder; so that they had no longer the appearance of banditti; but a regular army. For they took possession of several great cities, and breaking open the prisons by force, set at liberty without distinction all the prisoners, on whatsoever account they had been confined; and by promising them indemnity, and other indulgences, engaged them as their associates in this rebellion. And having over-run all Spain and Gaul, and taken many of the largest cities, they burnt part of them, and plundering the rest, they retreated,

When these transactions were related to Commodus, he sent letters full of wrath and menaces to the governors of those provinces, reproaching them with their negligence; and ordered them to levy an army against the rebels: who, when they were informed what forces were marching against them, they abandoned the plundered places, marched secretly in small parties, through rough and unfrequented roads, into Italy; and Maternus began now to form projects of greater magnitude, and to aim at the empire itself. For, as what he had hitherto attempted, had succeeded beyond his hopes; he thought that he must either make some
more

more bold attempt, and go directly forwards, or, if he should once be brought into a desperate situation, he was determined not to die ingloriously and undistinguished.

But as he was sensible that he had not a sufficient force to oppose to Commodus, in a regular engagement and an open attack; as the populace of Rome and the Prætorian guards were supposed to be firmly attached to the emperor; he hoped to gain his point by artifice and stratagem. And this was his plan:—

In the beginning of the spring, every year, on a stated day, the Romans celebrate a grand procession in honour of Cybele, the mother of
the

the gods. And on that occasion, whatever proofs of wealth or distinction every one is possessed of; as also from the imperial treasury, whatever is valuable for its materials or curious for its art and workmanship, is carried before the image of the goddess. An unrestrained liberty also is granted to the populace of every kind of ludicrous exhibitions; and every one assumes whatever mask he pleases; so that there is no dignity or magistracy so great, or rank so distinguished, but what any one that chuses it, may represent by his masquerade-dress; and conceal his real character so far, that the counterfeit cannot be distinguished from the person which he represents.

sents. This appeared to Maternus a fit opportunity to conceal his plot. For he hoped, that he himself taking the habit of one of the guards, and arming his followers in like manner, and mixing themselves with the rest of the armed troops; so that they should be thought part of the emperor's attendants or of the procession; he thought that on a sudden, while no one guarded him, he might assassinate Commodus.

But Maternus was betrayed by some of his accomplices, who came before him into the city, and discovered the plot before the day of the feast arrived: for they were provoked to it by envy; when they found,
that,

that, instead of a fellow-robber, they were to have a lord and a prince over them. Maternus himself was apprehended and his head cut off; and all the conspirators received the punishment they deserved. But Commodus, having sacrificed and offered gifts to the goddess, expressive of his gratitude; attended the procession with joy: and the whole Roman people celebrated the feast with great solemnity for the safety of the emperor. For the Romans pay peculiar devotion to this goddess, on a particular account: which, as it is not generally known to the Grecians, it may be proper here to relate. The image of this goddess, not formed

formed by human art, is *said* to have fallen from heaven, into the plains of Pessinus in Phrygia, where her orgies were particularly celebrated*.

When the Roman affairs began now to wear a respectable aspect; it was foretold by the oracle (as they say,) that their power would remain and flourish to a great degree, if they should transfer this Pessinuntian goddess to Rome. Ambassadors were dispatched accordingly into Phrygia, to ask for this sacred image: which they easily obtained; alledging their consanguinity; and that the Romans derived their original from the Phry-

* There is a page of confused mythology here omitted,

gian Æneas. The image therefore being brought on ship-board; and arriving at the mouth of the Tiber, (for the Romans at that time had no other ports) the ship on a sudden, as if by some divine impulse, made a full stand; nor could it be drawn by the united strength of the whole Roman people through the muddy stream till the arrival of a certain priestess of the goddess Vesta: who, though by her office she was under a vow of virginity, was accused of having been deflowered. But when sentence was about to be passed, she supplicated the people to refer the decision to the Pessinuntian goddess. Then loosening her zone, she

she fixed it to the prow of the ship; praying, that if she were a virgin and chaste, the ship would be prevailed on to move. When instantly the ship followed the zone which had been fixed to the prow. Thus the Romans beheld with admiration a proof of the innocence of the virgin, and the manifest power of the Divinity.

But too much perhaps has been said of the Pessinuntian goddess; yet not unacceptable, I hope, to those who have not much knowledge of the affairs of Rome.

S E C T.

S E C T. X.

COMMODUS, having escaped this conspiracy of Maternus; made use of a stronger guard about his person, and more rarely appeared in public: for the most part spending his time at his villas in the suburbs, or his palaces at some distance from the city; and refrained from attending the courts of justice or public tribunals; and indeed from performing any imperial act of power.

It happened also, at this time, that a pestilential disease prevailed through all Italy; but especially at Rome the
disorder

disorder raged with the utmost violence; the city being in itself very populous; and also thronged with strangers from every part of the world; so that there was a great destruction both of men and of all kinds of beasts of burthen. Commodus therefore, by the advice of his physicians, retired to Laurentum; that being a much cooler situation; and shaded with large groves of laurel, (whence also it takes its name.) For they were of opinion, that the agreeable odour* of those trees, and their cool shade, would counteract, and be

* They generally mean our bay-tree by *Laurus*.

the best preservative against the corrupted air.

For which reason those who continued in the city, by order of the physicians, stuffed their nostrils and their ears with sweet-scented unguents; and continually made use of fumigations and perfumes: because those sweet vapours, they said, having pre-occupied and filled up the pores, it prevented the admission of the corrupted air: or, if it had made its way into the habit, that its infection was overcome by the force of the perfumes. Nevertheless, the disease still prevailed in its full strength, and great numbers
of

of men, and of those domestic animals which live with men, daily perished.

and

H 2

S E C T.

S E C T. XI.

BUT about the same time a famine likewise oppressed the city; which was ascribed to the following cause:—There was one Cleander, a Phrygian by birth; of that description of men who sell goods by auction. This man having been introduced early into the imperial court, and having grown up with Commodus, had arrived at such a degree of honour and credit with him, that he alone was singly trusted with the guard of his person; the care of the bedchamber; and

and even the præfecture of the Prætorian cohorts. At length, elated with his great wealth, and intoxicated with the favour of Commodus, he had the vanity to aspire at the empire itself. Collecting therefore together great sums of money, and purchasing great quantities of corn, he was in hopes of bringing over the people and the army to promote his views, by first creating an artificial scarcity of the necessities of life, and then meriting their favour by liberal donations.

The same man had also built a very magnificent gymnasium, or place of exercise, and gave the people the free use of the baths

annexed to it. By these baits therefore he hoped to make himself popular, and secure the people in his interest.

But the Romans, having been long incensed against him; and considering him as the cause of all their dreadful sufferings; and moreover detesting the man for his insatiable avarice; assembled first, in crowds, in the theatre, venting their execrations against him; and at length, going in a body to Commodus, who was at a palace near the city, with great clamour demanded Cleander to be put to death. But now, the whole suburbs being in a tumult, while Commodus, in
this

this recess, was indulging his pleasures, entirely ignorant of the public rumours (for Cleander had strictly forbidden any one to inform him of what was doing) on a sudden (the people not expecting any such thing) the emperor's horse-guards, by order of Cleander, appeared in arms, flashing and wounding every one that came in their way. Neither was it possible for the people to withstand them: for what could unarmed men do against those that were armed; or men on foot against the cavalry? Being therefore put to flight, they retired into the city: but many of the people were destroyed, not only by the soldiers, and by being trampled

on by the horses; but also crushed to death by the crowd of those who were endeavouring to escape from the horsemen: who pursued them, without resistance, as far as the gates of Rome; and slew all that fell into their hands.

But when those who had remained in the city were informed of what had befallen their party, barricading their doors, and escaping to the tops of their houses, they threw down stones and tiles on the heads of the horsemen, who now suffered severely in their turn; not being able to make any regular attack; and the people fighting out of the reach of danger. Being therefore

fore wounded, and not able to stand it any longer, they turned their backs and fled. But many of them were destroyed by the continual showers of stones: and the horses stumbling amidst the stones that were rolled from the houses, fell themselves with their riders. Many therefore falling on each side, the foot soldiers that were stationed in the city, through hatred of the horse-guards, gave assistance to the people.

But though there was now an intestine war actually begun, yet, through dread of Cleander's power, no one was willing to inform Commodus of the matter; till Fadilla,
Commodus's

Commodus's eldest sister, running in to the emperor, to whom she had always free access, with her hair dishevelled, and with every appearance of the utmost grief, throwing herself at his feet; " You, my " Prince," said she, " remain here " at your ease, in total ignorance of " what is going on; when you are " at this moment in the utmost " danger; and we, the nearest in " relation to your royal person, are " on the brink of destruction. The " whole Roman people, and a great " part of the army, are rushing in " upon us; and what we could " never expect to suffer from bar- " barians we have reason to dread " from

“ from our domestic foes. And
 “ those, to whom you have been
 “ the greatest benefactor, are now
 “ your bitterest enemies. Cleander
 “ has armed the people and the army
 “ against you. And those who are
 “ of different sentiments in other
 “ respects; the people that hate
 “ Cleander, and the horse-guards
 “ that love him, are equally in arms;
 “ and destroying each other have
 “ filled Rome with the blood of their
 “ fellow-citizens. But the suffer-
 “ ings of each party will fall ulti-
 “ mately on us; unless you imme-
 “ diately deliver up to his fate this
 “ wicked minister; the cause of so
 “ much calamity to the people al-
 6 “ ready:

“ ready: and who will very soon
 “ be so to us *.”

Having uttered these words, she tore her robes; and some others of those that were present, being encouraged by this speech of the emperor's sister, endeavoured to alarm the fears of Commodus: who being now greatly terrified, at the danger not impending, but really present, ordered Cleander to be instantly sent for: who knew not for certain, but began to suspect the intelligence which had been given. But the

* Some historians join Marcia, Commodus's favourite mistress, in this intercession. But Herodian always observes a decorum towards the imperial family.

emperor

emperor commanded him immediately to be apprehended, and his head to be exhibited on a long spear; a spectacle very agreeable and long wished for by the people.

Thus a stop was put to this calamity, and the combatants on each side put an end to their hostilities. The soldiers seeing him dead for whom they fought, and fearing the resentment of the emperor; who, they found, had been deceived; and that Cleander had acted on this occasion contrary to his orders:—the people, on the other hand, thought themselves *sufficiently* gratified for their sufferings, by the punishment of the author. But the children

also

also of Cleander (for he had two sons) and all his friends in general, were slain, and their bodies dragged through the streets, and treated with every mark of ignominy, and at last thrown into the common sewer. Such was the fate of Cleander and all his adherents: human nature having made an ostentatious display of her power, (as it were) in a single man; shewing that she could raise him from the very dregs of the people to the first rank in the state; and again, by the slightest and most unexpected change of fortune, cast him headlong to destruction.

S E C T.

S E C T. XII.

BUT Commodus, though fearing lest the people should again raise tumults, yet, by the persuasion of his friends, returned into the city; and being received with the joyful acclamations of the populace, and attended by crowds, returned to the imperial palace. But having experienced so many dangers, he no longer placed any confidence in any one: and, giving too easy credit to every calumny, put many to death without mercy: so
that

that he would admit no one of any consequence to come near him : but abandoning every laudable pursuit ; and enslaved to every vile passion ; he, night and day, indulged himself in a succession of the most brutal pleasures. And every one, that had the least pretensions to decency, or to science of any kind, was banished from the court as a spy and a traitor.

But to buffoons, and the basest mimics, he was most cordially attached. He was also instructed in and frequently practised the driving chariots and fighting with wild beasts ; and his flatterers celebrated his courage and dexterity on these occasions ;

occasions; but he was more addicted to these diversions than was suitable to the dignity of a great prince.

There were also, about this time, some prodigies in the heavens. For stars were seen by day for some time; some of them extended to a great length and seeming suspended in the air. And likewise animals of every kind were frequently brought forth of unnatural forms, and with limbs disproportioned to their bodies.

But the greatest and most dreadful calamity, which was attended with universal concern at the present time; and alarmed all men with the most ominous apprehensions of the future,

I

was

was this :—without any preceding storms, or any thick clouds; but a slight earthquake having been felt; whether by some lightning which fell by night; or from some fire which might escape from the concussion of the earth; the whole temple of Peace, the greatest and most beautiful structure in the city, was entirely consumed: which was also, of all the temples, the richest in its ornaments; and, being strongly fortified, was, for its security, the common repository of the wealth of the citizens; who brought thither their money as to a public treasury. But this fire happening in the night, reduced many rich families to poverty.

ty. All men therefore lamented the public loss, but many deplored their own private misfortune.

The same fire however destroyed not only the temple of Peace, but all the circumjacent buildings, and laid waste many of the most beautiful edifices in the city. And when the temple of Vesta also was on fire, the Palladium or sacred image of Minerva was exposed to public view; that image, which the Romans so religiously worship and conceal from the eyes of the vulgar; (it having, as they say, been brought thither from Troy on their first arrival in Italy;) this was now for the first

time seen by men : for the priestesses of the goddess, the vestal virgins, conveyed it down the midst of the Via Sacra, or great sacred street, to the palace of the emperor : many other beautiful parts of the city were also burnt; the fire raging for several days ; nor did it cease at last, till some plentiful showers falling suppressed its fury.

The whole conducting of this affair therefore was ascribed to some divine power by the men of that age ; by whose will they supposed the fire both began and ended. And they naturally interpreted the destruction of the temple of Peace

as

as an omen of the ensuing wars.
Which, as I shall hereafter relate,
was verified by the event.

THESE, to many, and such
terrible calamities therefore
afflicting the city in succession; the
Roman people no longer belid
Commodus with complacency; and
pervolence; but imputed the evils
of them to his indurminate ex-
cesses, and his other iniquities and
wicked actions. For his vices were
not concealed from the people; nei-
ther did he wish them to be con-
cealed. But what he was accused
of doing secretly in his palace, he
was not ashamed to exhibit publicly

S E C T. XIII.

THESE, so many and such terrible calamities therefore afflicting the city in succession; the Roman people no longer beheld Commodus with complacency and benevolence: but imputed the causes of them to his indiscriminate executions, and his other impious and wicked actions. For his vices were not concealed from the people; neither did he wish them to be concealed. But what he was accused of doing secretly in his palace; he was not ashamed to exhibit boldly in

in public. And he at length proceeded to that degree of madness and wanton folly; as, first of all, to renounce his family name; and instead of Commodus, the son of Marcus, ordered himself to be called Hercules, the son of Jupiter. And, laying aside the Roman and imperial habit, he made use of a lion's skin; and carried an Herculean club in his hand. He sometimes also appeared in a purple robe, wrought with gold; exposing himself to the utmost ridicule; by imitating at the same time the strength of heroes and the effeminate luxury of the female sex: such however he exhibited himself in public.

He also changed the names of the months; and, instead of their ancient names, imposed new ones from some of his own assumed appellations; many of them however had some reference to Hercules, as his favourite hero, on account of his strength. He also erected statues of himself in every part of the city; and one before the senate-house bending a bow: for he was willing to have his very images strike terror into the people. This however, after his death, the senate removed, and erected a statue of Liberty in its place.

But Commodus, no longer able to suppress his folly, made public proclamation of spectacles which he intended

intended to exhibit; promising to slay with his own hand every kind of wild beasts; and to engage in single combat with the bravest of the Roman youth. This report being spread abroad, there assembled from every part of Italy, and the neighbouring nations, all kinds of people, to behold, what no one had ever before seen, or heard of. For he was reported to have so sure an hand that he never once failed to strike whatever he aimed at, either with his javelins or his arrows: he having always about him Parthians the most skilful at their bow; and Numidians the most dexterous at throwing the javelin: all whom he excelled

led

led in skill, at their respective weapons.

When the day of exhibiting arrived, the amphitheatre was crowded: and there was built for Commodus a circular gallery; lest, fighting on a level with the wild beasts, he should be exposed to danger; but, by hurling his javelin from on high and in a place of safety, he might give them specimens of his skill, rather than of his courage. Pursuing therefore and running in a line with them, he struck down stags and deer, and every kind of horned animals, except bulls; and not suffering them to escape from his reach, he slew them with unerring and well-directed

ed strokes. But lions and panthers and other more noble beasts running in a circle, he hurled his javelin from an elevated situation and slew them. Nor did any one ever see him throw a second dart; or inflict any wound, that was not mortal. For the moment the beast roused himself and made towards him, he struck him either in the forehead or into his heart; neither was the javelin ever aimed or struck into any part of the body, that it did not at the same instant wound the animal and lay it dead on the spot.

These animals were sent in droves to the emperor; and we then first saw in reality, what we had before
only

only admired in painting. For from India and Æthiopia, from the southern and from the northern regions of the earth, whatever animal was before unknown, was exhibited to the Roman people, and slain by Commodus. And all men were astonished at the unerring dexterity of his hand.

Sometimes, making use of arrows, with heads shaped like a half moon, he would shoot at the ostriches, (which, being swift of foot and using their wings as sails, run with great rapidity,) directing his arrows to the upper part of their necks, he would cut off their heads so instantaneously, by the force of his weapons, that they

they still kept running on for a few moments, as if nothing had happened.

And a panther once having, by his great agility, just seized a man that was brought upon the stage, and going to devour him; Commodus with his javelin prevented him; killed the panther; and *disappointed** his teeth, by the *point* of his spear.

An hundred lions also having been let loose from their dens in the theatre, he slew them all with exactly the same number of weapons. So that although there were so many of them,

* The author here makes a pretty antithesis, but the translator's jingle will hardly be admitted.

they

they lay in such order, that they might easily be reckoned up; and there was not one superfluous javelin to be seen.

S E C T.

S E C T. XIV.

HITHERTO therefore, though his actions were very unbecoming a great prince; yet, as they discovered a degree of courage and of skill, they were received with some kind of favour and popularity. But, when he appeared naked in the amphitheatre; and, taking their arms, fought as a gladiator, this indeed was a mournful spectacle to the Roman people. That an emperor, so nobly born, after so many trophies of his father and his ancestors, instead of taking up military arms and such as

became

7

became his imperial dignity, should pollute, as it were, his high office by the base and ignominious habit of a gladiator.

Commodus then engaging as a combatant, easily overcame his antagonists; but proceeded no further than to wound them; as they all submitted; considering him as their emperor, and not as a gladiator*.

• But he now proceeded to that excess of madness and folly, that he had resolved no longer to inhabit the

* Dion Cassius mentions an instance of inhumanity, scarce credible; —that, having collected a number of poor cripples and invalids; and dressed them up like dragons and other monsters; he rushed in, like Don Quixote at the puppet-show, and slew them all.

imperial

imperial palace, but to go over to the school of the gladiators. Neither would he suffer himself any longer to be called Hercules, but adopted the name of a celebrated deceased gladiator. Nay further, having taken off the head of a colossal statue of the sun, he had his own head fixed on in its place. And, having it inscribed, as is usual, on the pedestal, with the imperial and his paternal titles, instead of Germanicus, or the Conqueror of Germany, he styled himself, "The Conqueror of a thousand Gladiators."

Commodus however ought at least to have ceased from his madness, and *freed* the Romans from his tyranny, at a season, when they celebrate the

K

new

new year, and keep a solemn festival in honour of Saturn; the most ancient of their gods. On which occasion they congratulate and wish each other joy; and send mutually presents of money and all kinds of new-year's gifts; rejoicing in a community of the fruits of the earth and the produce of the sea. And the chief magistrates, the new consuls, on that day assume their solemn purple and robes of state. Now, while they were all engaged in celebrating this festival, Commodus had determined to issue forth, not from the imperial palace, (as is customary) but from the schools of the gladiators: and instead of the robe of state and the imperial

perial purple, to exhibit himself to the Roman people, with the arms of a *prize-fighter*; attended by the rest of the gladiators.

But having communicated his intention to Marcia, whom of all his concubines he most regarded; and whom he treated almost as a wife; granting her all the honours of an empress, except that of the sacred fire: she, the moment she heard his absurd and scandalous resolution, began earnestly to intreat him, and falling at his feet, to beseech him, with tears, neither to dishonour the imperial dignity of Rome; nor to expose himself to danger, by engaging in combat with those desperate

K 2

gladiators.

gladiators. But, after using every argument to no purpose, she departed bathed in tears*.

* This lady, like many others in her situation, seems to have had many good qualities, and much good sense, to have been able to keep her station against 300 rivals, of both sexes: the ecclesiastical writers ascribe it to her influence, that the Christians escaped persecution in this reign: and charitably suppose, that though she was an harlot, she was yet a good Christian.

S E C T. XV.

BUT Commodus, sending for Lætus, his captain of the guards, and Electus, his principal chamberlain; ordered them to make preparations for his spending the night in the school of the gladiators: as he intended to proceed from thence to the sacrifice on account of the new year, that he might appear armed to the people. But they also intreated him, and attempted to prevail on him, not to do any thing so unworthy the imperial dignity.

Commodus, being greatly provoked, dismissed them from his presence; and retiring to his apartment to sleep (as was his custom at noon) he took one of those pocket-books, made of the inner rind of the linden-tree, finely wrought, which fold up either way*, and wrote down the names of those, whom he intended that night to put to death. In this list, Marcia was the first; Lætus and Electus, the next; then followed a great number of the chief men of the senators. For he was determined to get rid of all the old friends of his father, being ashamed to have such

* It is not easy to form an idea of these little books, at this distance of time.

venerable spectators of his shameful actions. And the wealth of the rich, he was willing to have in his power, to divide it amongst the soldiers and the gladiators; the former, that they might defend him; and the latter, that they might entertain him.

Having then written down his list, he laid the pocket-book on the couch, not imagining that any one would come into his apartment.

Now there was a little boy, a mere child; of that sort, who run about, naked in other respects, but adorned with gold trinkets and valuable jewels; which kind of boys, the luxurious part of the Romans greatly delight in. Commodus was so fond

of this child, that he frequently slept with him; and he was called Philo-Commodus, a name expressive of the affection, which the emperor had for him. This boy then, who had admittance at all times, while Commodus was indulging himself in the bath, and stupid with his usual excess; ran into the bedchamber; and, taking up the * pocket-book which lay

* The horrid contents of this fatal pocket-book must have been curious. Mem. Marcia, Lætus, and Electus, are all agreed in censuring my conduct.—Die to night.

Those old fellows, with their stoical faces, seem to be making comparisons between me and my father. Mem. Stop their mouths the first opportunity.

That fat fellow is big enough to make two men. Mem. Split him through the middle.

That

lay on the couch, to play with, he went out of the house. But, as if directed by some good genius, he met with Marcia at the door: who, being also fond of this boy, having first fondled and kissed him, took the pocket-book from him, fearing, lest through his childish ignorance he should blot out something of consequence: and knowing the hand of Commodus, she was on that account the more curious to discover its contents. But when she found it contained such fatal mandates; and that

That rascal heated my bath too hot. Mem.
Let him be thrown into a copper of boiling water.

These are said to have been real facts!!

she

she herself was first destined to die,
 and that Lætus and Electus were to
 follow; and that so great a slaughter
 of other miserable people was deter-
 mined; she thus expressed her indig-
 nation: “ Very well, my friend
 “ Commodus: is this the return
 “ you make me for my fondness and
 “ affection? for having so many
 “ years borne with your insults and
 “ drunken frolics? But you shall
 “ not succeed in your murderous
 “ intentions. You will find a sober
 “ woman too hard for a drunken
 “ brute!” Having said thus, she
 immediately sent for Electus: for he
 had often access to her; as having
 the care of the bedchamber; and

was also suspected to have had a criminal intrigue with her. "See here!" said she, giving him the pocket-book; "see, what sort of a festival we are likely to celebrate to-night!" He having read the contents, with the utmost astonishment; and being by nation an Egyptian; bold, irascible, and active; sealing up the book; sent it by a faithful messenger to be perused by Lætus. He also, being greatly alarmed, came immediately to Marcia; as if to consult with them about the orders, which the emperor had given for his spending the night with the gladiators. They therefore pretending to consider about these affairs; unanimously

mously agreed that they must immediately either destroy the tyrant or be destroyed themselves; that there was no room for delay or procrastination.

S E C T.

S E C T. XVI.

THEY determined therefore to give Commodus an effectual dose of poison: which Marcia undertook to administer; this she could easily do, as she used to mix and give him his first draught after bathing, that he might drink with greater pleasure from the hands of a beloved mistress. As soon, therefore, as he came from the bath, she presented him the cup, in which she had mixed the poison with some wine of an agreeable flavour and fragrant scent. He being thirsty after bathing and
the

the fatigue of exercise, drank without suspicion of the cup; which he considered as the usual mark of her fondness. But immediately a drowsiness seized him; and being inclined to sleep, which he supposed to be the consequence of his fatigue, he lay down to rest. But Marcia and Electus ordered every one to retire and go to their respective homes; that Commodus might not be disturbed. Indeed he used frequently to have these drowsy fits, from a surfeit of wine: and, bathing and banqueting so often, he had no fixed time for rest. For, continually indulging himself in one pleasure after another, and those of different kinds, he

he was quite a slave to his appetites. After he had rested therefore for a short time, the poison having worked itself into his stomach and bowels; he was seized with a giddiness, and a violent vomiting ensued; whether the food which he had lately taken, and the great quantity of wine which he had drank, expelled the poison; or whether the antidote, which the emperors used to take before their meals, prevented its deleterious effect.

As the vomiting however was very violent, being apprehensive lest, if the whole poison should be thrown up, and he might recover, they should all be put to death; they prevailed
upon

upon one Narcissus, a bold and robust young man, by the promise of a great reward, to go in and strangle Commodus in his bedchamber; which, as he was languid from the effects of the poison and his preceding debauch, he seized him by the throat and easily effected.

Such was the end of Commodus; after a reign of thirteen years from the death of his father: the most nobly born of any of his predecessors in the empire; and the handsomest man of his age: and, if one may speak of his manly exploits, he was inferior to no one in dexterity at throwing the javelin, or in directing his arrows to their destined mark.

But all his good qualities he debased,
 as has been related, by the vilest and
 most ignominious pursuits.

S E C T. XVII.

COMMODUS being thus slain, the conspirators, to conceal what they had done from the guards about the palace, wrapping up the body in a coarse blanket, gave it to two domestics in whom they could confide, to convey it out, as if it was some useless piece of furniture, from the bedchamber. They accordingly bore it through the midst of the guards, some of whom were drunk; some half asleep with their spears in their hands. But none of them troubled their heads about what was brought

brought out of the bedchamber, as it did not concern them to know it. Thus the body of the emperor was secretly brought forth, and conveyed in a carriage to a place of burial in the suburbs*,

After some consultation, Lætus, Electus, and Marcia, agreed to give out, that Commodus died suddenly of an apoplexy; which account his enormous gluttony and drunkenness would render extremely probable,

But first of all they thought it necessary to fix immediately upon some man, advanced in years, and of known virtue and moderation, to take upon

* The Oxford edition says *απισειον*; but the most probable reading is *ωπισειον*, the suburbs.

him the sovereign power: whose character might justify their proceedings, and give all men time to breathe, from so cruel and excessive a tyranny. After some deliberation, therefore, they found no one so proper for their purpose, as Helvius Pertinax.

Pertinax was an Italian by birth, of a mean family, but illustrious by his conduct both at home and in war, having raised many trophies of his victories over the Germans, and over the barbarians of the East; and being the only one of the venerable friends of Commodus's father, whom he had not put to death: either through reverence of his character; or on account of his supposed poverty:

verty: for it was no small addition to the other encomiums which he had merited; that although he had a greater share in the administration under Marcus Antoninus, yet Pertinax had raised the smallest fortune of any of his friends.

To Pertinax then, in the dead of night, Lætus and Electus, with a few of their adherents, repaired. On being admitted to his bedside, he, without changing his countenance, or raising himself from his bed, desired them to execute the orders, which he had long expected from the cruelty and caprice of Commodus; as he was the only one remaining of his father's old friends. But Lætus begged

ged him not to entertain sentiments so unworthy of himself and his known merit—That they were not come to put him to death; but to raise him to the empire: which he alone, of all the senators, was really worthy to enjoy; on account of his virtue, the severity of his morals, and even the authority which his advanced age would procure him.

As he continued still to distrust their intentions, Electus produced the pocket-book, and shewed him the danger they had all escaped: which when Pertinax had read, and understood the whole affair, he, with some difficulty, resigned himself to their discretion.

Lætus, being commander of the Prætorian cohorts, undertook to bring them over and reconcile them to their choice. They thought it best therefore to conduct the new emperor immediately to the camp*, but at the same time to dispatch some faithful adherents, to spread abroad the news, that Commodus was dead, and that Pertinax was now with the army, and had taken upon him the imperial power.

As soon as this report had been dispersed amongst the people, they ran through the streets frantic with joy; and congratulating each other

* Close to the eastern walls of Rome.

choice;

upon

upon the death of the tyrant. Some also repaired to the temples and the altars, to return thanks to the gods for their deliverance. But a great part of the people hastened to the Prætorian camp; fearing lest the soldiery should not so readily submit to receive Pertinax for emperor; whom they knew to be a man accustomed to a more rigid discipline than they had experienced under Commodus; who indulged them in every kind of rapine, violence, and oppression. As soon therefore as they were come to the camp, Lætus and Electus arrived; bringing Pertinax with them; whom Lætus in a short speech recommended to their choice;

choice ; as venerable for his age, his virtuous life, and his experience in military affairs, and one, in short, who would be a good emperor and the father of his country.

This speech the people received with the loudest acclamations ; but the army appearing rather cool and hesitating, the people immediately saluted Pertinax by the title of Augustus ; called him Father of his Country, poured forth blessings on his head, with every auspicious acclamation which their joy could suggest.

The soldiers now joined the people, though reluctantly, in proclaiming Pertinax Emperor and Au-

M gustus.

gustus. They took the oath of fidelity to him; and, as soon as it was day, attended him to the senate-house:—though Pertinax would not suffer the sacred fire nor any of the imperial ensigns to be carried before him, till his title was confirmed by the senate.

It is only necessary to add, that the senate received, with equal joy, the news of the death of Commodus and of the elevation of Pertinax to the imperial purple. The latter they received with more transports of joy than the people had done; confirmed his title, and forced him to ascend the throne. As for Commodus, they expressed the utmost detestation

of his memory; declared it infamous; called him Tyrant, Gladiator, and the Enemy of mankind: ordered his decrees to be reversed, his statues to be thrown down, and his titles to be erased. They would have had his body treated with the usual indignity shewn by the Romans to their wicked emperors*;

as
 * As the body was conveyed by two servants out of the palace, before the conspirators went to the house of Pertinax, I would willingly hope that the beloved Marcia, after she had secured her own life by the death of the tyrant, might still retain so much tenderness for her young emperor, as, in conjunction with the chamberlain, to give him a decent interment.—One cannot read without indignation, that the fair tyrannicide, who, with her colleagues, had freed the world from such a monster, should herself be put
 to

as it is said, out of regard to the memory of his father Marcus Aurelius, had it conveyed to the magnificent tomb of the Ælian family, built by Hadrian*: yet at this mark of respect to the memory of the tyrant, the senate expressed no small indignation.

to death by the foolish Didius, to please the Prætorian cohorts; of whom he had so scandalously purchased the empire: and which power he scarce enjoyed for sixty days: though with the same base flattery to the Prætorians he had assumed the name of the worthless Commodus.

* Now the castle of St. Angelo.

F I N I S.



